

COVID-19

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British Columbia

Study finds novel coronavirus on shared medical equipment in long-term care homes

More research needed to determine whether this could lead to virus transmission, researcher says

[Ben Mussett](#) · CBC News · Posted: Jul 31, 2020 2:31 PM PT | Last Updated: July 31, 2020





COVID-19 was found on standard, reusable blood pressure cuffs at three long-term care facilities in the Vancouver Coastal Health region. (CBC)

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Some medical experts are encouraging long-term care homes to intensify cleaning procedures after a new study found shared medical equipment is at high risk of contamination by the novel coronavirus.

The study led by Vancouver Coast Health (VCH) found that communal blood-pressure cuffs and other medical equipment that moves from room-to-room may be more likely to spread the virus that causes COVID-19 than stationary surfaces, which may be cleaned more often.

Researchers took 89 swab samples at three long-term care facilities in the VCH region experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks, where cleaning protocols had been enhanced.

Only six swabs came back positive, but the virus was detected on standard, reusable blood pressure cuffs found in each facility.

Four out of nine swabs from blood cuffs were contaminated. The other two positive samples came from the handle of a mobile linen cart and an electronic tablet used to track medication records.

Study highlighted 'areas of concern'

"This study was done in sites with known outbreaks where enhanced cleaning was already in place, so we would hope that the virus would not be present on medical equipment that is moved from room to room," Dr. Atiba Nelson, the lead author of the study, said in a media release.

"Although more research is needed to determine if this kind of contamination could contribute to transmission of the virus, it did highlight areas of concern."

Following the study, VCH replaced shared blood pressure cuffs and other medical equipment at the care homes with disposable cuffs or personalized equipment that won't be shared among residents.

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The study's authors recommend care facilities further enhance cleaning of all medical equipment and prohibit communal use.

Medical equipment used by residents who have the virus should remain isolated in one room.

A March study by the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases found the virus can remain detectable on hard, smooth surfaces like plastic or stainless steel for up to three days.

The virus could then spread if a person who touches a contaminated object or surface then touches their mouth, eyes or nose with their contaminated hands.

COVID-19 spread mainly though person-to-person contact

However, experts now believe COVID-19 is mainly spread through person-to-person transmission.

In an article published in The Lancet journal earlier this month, Emanuel Goldman, a microbiology professor at the New Jersey Medical School of Rutgers University, said that the risk of COVID-19 infection from surfaces is "exaggerated."

"This is not a significant risk," he told CBC News. "Not even a measurable risk."

But Dr. Michael Schwandt, VCH's medical health officer and co-author of the article, says context matters.

"Direct, person-to-person contact is by far the biggest for COVID-19," Schwandt said.

"We don't suppose that surface contamination is a major driver of transmission in the community in general."

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In a long-term care home dealing with a major outbreak, however, Schwandt said unchecked surface contamination could significantly worsen the spread.

The VCH study was published this month in the American Journal of Infection Control.

With files from Emily Chung, Adam Miller and Lauren Pelley

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